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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TASHKENT 001315

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/CEN

AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO USOFFICE ALMATY

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/07/27

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [KPAO](#) [ECON](#) [UZ](#)

SUBJECT: Uzbekistan: New MFA Americas Department Officials Proactive, Cooperative

REF: TASHKENT 1279; TASHKENT 1259; TASHKENT 423

CLASSIFIED BY: Steven Prohaska, Second Secretary, State, Pol-Econ;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: In a meeting with us on July 22, new MFA Americas Department officials Bakhtiyor Ibragimov and Nurillo Abdullaev discussed a wide range of issues and showed themselves to be highly proactive, cooperative, and interested in addressing problems in our bilateral relationship. Ibragimov assured us that the GOU is actively searching for a solution to NDN-related train delays and would solve the problem soon. They expressed concern about the recent disruption of an Embassy-sponsored educational session and indicated that we may be able to avert such problems with advance notification of such activities. They also indicated interest in greater communication and coordination with Embassy staff. We are encouraged by the tone of this meeting, but it is important to keep in mind that both Ibragimov and Abdullaev are relatively new to their positions, and the extent to which they will be able to back this positive rhetoric-on NDN, educational exchanges, and other issues-with action is unclear for the time being. End summary.

MFA Promises Rapid Solution of NDN-Related Train Delays

¶2. (C) On July 22, during a long discussion with Charge d'Affaires and Poloff, MFA's new Chief of the Americas Department Bakhtiyor Ibragimov and Acting USA Desk Chief Nurillo Abdullaev addressed issues including NDN, education, and economics. Ibragimov noted that former Americas Department Chief Mamadjanov had departed for Greece the previous day, and that as of today, Ibragimov has-unofficially-assumed his position. Upon raising USG concerns about excessive delays in clearing Northern Distribution Network trains transiting Uzbekistan's borders, Ibragimov assured us that GOU ministries are actively studying how to expedite cargo shipments. He said the issue will be resolved soon and the problem will not resurface (reftel A).

¶3. (C) Ibragimov and Abdullaev also indicated that the Government of Uzbekistan was working to arrange NDN-related meetings for Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) representatives Andrew Kuchins and Thomas Sanderson with Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations, Information-Analytic Center for Drug Control, Institute for Strategic and Interregional Studies, Foundation for Regional Policy, and Ministry of Defense. They hoped that these meetings would take place at the Deputy Minister level and that the CSIS representatives would be satisfied. They also said they would send the full schedule by the following day. (Note: As promised, they confirmed all of these meetings-as well as an additional meeting with Secretary Atayev at the National Security Council-the following day and invited Embassy staff to attend. End note.)

Surprised to Hear of Samarkand Incident, Interested in More Communication

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¶4. (C) Ibragimov expressed interest in meeting with Post's Public Affairs Officer this week to learn more about the Public Affairs Section's programs and to exchange views on increasing cooperation on such issues. Ibragimov added that he would be interested in meeting with all U.S. Embassy offices involved in assistance programs. He rejected Charge's invitation to come to the U.S. Embassy for such meetings, indicating that he would prefer to meet Embassy staff at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

¶5. (C) Charge brought up the recent case of GOU officials shutting down an Embassy-sponsored educational outreach program in Samarkand (reftel B), noting that it was important to prevent this from happening in the future. Ibragimov appeared surprised and asked that Post inform him in advance of any such planned activities. He initially blamed provincial officials for the incident and indicated that prior notification would help in the future. "We might have been able to stop this. Local officials don't always know everything and are not aware of the state of bilateral relations," he asserted. Later in the afternoon, Abdullaev anxiously called Post requesting more information about the incident in Samarkand, and reiterated Ibragimov's points in a conversation with Public Affairs Officer. (Note: In a subsequent meeting with PAO, Ibragimov delivered a strongly-worded diplomatic note to her indicating that Embassy staff had violated Uzbekistan's laws by teaching without a license, and alluded to "realities of Uzbekistan" (likely the National Security Service) requiring MFA to act. He nevertheless suggested that similar problems could be avoided in the future with advance notification, and said that MFA can be seen as a "facilitator" to make Embassy events go "more smoothly." End note.)

¶6. (C) Ibragimov stated that the U.S. Embassy used to provide the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with advance copies of its press releases, and asked that Post resume this practice by sending these to his and Abdullaev's email addresses. "Information is vital for us to do our jobs," Ibragimov said. "We are trying to prevent problems."

¶7. (C) Ibragimov and Abdullaev took a moment to gloat about Uzbekistan's positive economic growth for the year, citing a Cabinet of Ministers meeting that addressed socioeconomic development in the country a few days earlier. (Note: According to official press, Uzbekistan's GDP growth in the first six months of 2009 was 8.2 percent. End note.) Charge responded that he would like to see a reduction in barriers to investment in Uzbekistan, and noted the continuing problem with currency conversion that afflicts most U.S. investors not involved in extractive industries. He said that General Motors plans to employ many people in Uzbekistan in order to provide engines, transmissions, and other parts for automobile production. Charge added that Uzbekistan has a huge, cheap labor force, and that there should be far more European and Asian investment in Uzbekistan than there is right now, given Uzbekistan's natural advantages. Ibragimov suggested addressing these issues in the bilateral structured commission that the U.S. proposed during the visit by U/S Burns.

Comment:

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¶8. (C) Ibragimov and Abdullaev said many of the right things, and their eagerness to engage with Post and address problems in the bilateral relationship is a good sign. Both displayed a more proactive and cooperative tone than that which we have come to expect during MFA meetings. We wonder whether Ibragimov may not suffer from the same clan-related limitations that appear to have affected Mamadjanov (reftel C). Ibragimov's fluent English language skills certainly will be an asset in engaging with Post's staff. Still, it is important to note that both Ibragimov and Abdullaev are relatively new to their positions, and the extent to which they will be able to back this positive rhetoric-on NDN, educational exchanges, and other issues-with action is unclear for the time being.

BUTCHER